# *Di*+art, Specificity and Islandhood

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The main goal of this presentation is to provide a new semantically-based analysis of the so-called 'partitive determiner' in Italian, which accounts for its specific interpretations, as well as additional empirical observations. Since this determiner cannot convey a proper partitive meaning (Barker 1998), but an indefinite one (Storto 2003, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018, Garzonio & Poletto 2020), we will abandon the label 'partitive article', and adopt the more descriptive term *di*+art.

Our hypothesis on the *di*+art complex form is that it is an indefinite expression denoting small quantity (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018, 2020), for which a morphosyntactic [q]uantity feature is postulated (Pinzin & Poletto 2021a). Moreover, we hypothesize that *di*+art allows specific readings, which can also escape scope islands, as the result of the application of a semantic choice function; this function applies to the non-empty set denoted by the descriptive content of the noun and yields a (specific) member of that set (Reinhart 1997).

We assume, following Chierchia (1998) and Cardinaletti & Giusti (2016), that *di*+art cannot be associated to a quantifier structure, since (i) it cannot be coordinated with other overt quantifiers (1a); (ii) it cannot be resumed by the quantitative clitic *ne* (1b); and (iii) it can function as the indefinite internal argument of a universal quantifier (1c).

(1) a. *\*Dei* ma non molti ragazzi. (Chierchia 1998: 92, ex. (38d))
    b. \*Ne ho visti *dei*. (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 69, ex. (48b))
    c. Ha fatto tutti dei discorsi strani. (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 71, ex. (55a))

Still, the literature has assumed that *di*+art nominals are existentially quantified DPs and, consequently, that they allow for scopal alternations with respect to other operators in the same sentence (Chierchia 1998; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018, among others). This scopal behavior can be observed in the following example involving a negative context: it illustrates that *di*+art followed by plural count nouns, when it outscopes negation, allows a discourse continuation that highlights a specific reading (2a).

(2) Non ho visto *dei ragazzi*. (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 60, ex. (6))
    a. Ho visto Gianni e Maria, ma non ho visto Mario e Teresa.    *- specific*
    b. Ho visto solo (dei) bambini.    *- non-specific*

However, if *di*+art nominals were merely existentially quantified DPs, their scopal behavior would have to mirror that of other quantificational DPs and be constrained by the same scope island restrictions. Yet, this hypothesis cannot explain an empirical observation that, to our knowledge, has gone unnoticed in the literature on this complex determiner: the fact that *di*+art, as well as other indefinite determiners, can escape scope islands. Thus, for instance, in one possible reading, (3) means that there are some specific students (let's say, Luca, Maria, and Gianni) that have cheated and that the fact that these specific students have cheated is known by all the professors (3a) (see also Ihsane 2008 for similar examples for French *des*-phrases).

(3) Tutti i professori hanno sentito la notizia che *degli* studenti hanno copiato.

    a.  $\exists f\ [CH(f) \wedge \forall x[professors(x) \rightarrow heard(x, the\ news\ that\ f(students)\ copied)]]$ – *widest scope: specific reading of the indefinite*
    b.  $\forall x[professors(x) \rightarrow \exists f\ [CH(f) \wedge heard(x, the\ news\ that\ f(students)\ copied)]]$ – *intermediate scope: non-specific reading of the indefinite*
    c.  $\forall x[professors(x) \rightarrow heard(x, the\ news\ that\ x's\ students\ copied)]$ – *narrowest scope: bound variable interpretation of the indefinite*

We also argue that the fact that *di*+art is able to escape scope islands and be assigned a specific, referential interpretation is even more clearly attested in so-called opaque environments (i.e., contexts created by intensional verbs, verbs of propositional attitude, modals, conditionals, etc.), which disambiguate the specific and non-specific readings via an alternation between the indicative and the subjunctive mood respectively.

(4) Gianni non aveva considerato il fatto che *dei* politici *sono* corrotti.  *- specific*
              *dei* politici *siano* corrotti.  *- non-specific*

This special scopal behavior would be nicely accounted for if we assume that *di*+art nominals are interpreted locally, via choice-functions, and that the function-variable can be existentially closed far away, allowing them free – widest (3a), intermediate (3b) or narrowest (3c) - scope (Reinhart 1997).
Furthermore, it should be noticed that all the specific readings highlighted above are compatible with referential interpretations of the nominal (as attested, for instance, by the continuation in (2a)). For this reason, we defend that a conception of specificity different from scope specificity is needed to account for the specific readings associated to this determiner, and, consequently, what looks like an exceptional scopal behavior. In particular, we rely on the notion of referential and epistemic specificity (Haspelmath 1997; Farkas 2000; von Heusinger 2011; Ihsane 2021; Espinal & Cyrino 2021; i.a.) and argue that the specific interpretations of *di*+art correspond to the referential intent of the speaker that uses this determiner. This proposal implies that the referent of the noun introduced by the determiner *di*+art has to be atomizable (i.e., reducible to atomic parts). If this assumption is on the right track, notice that our proposal would also account nicely for the observation put forward in the literature – though not satisfactorily explained – that *di*+art can receive specific readings with respect to other operators in the sentence only when it precedes plural count nouns, but not with mass nouns.

(5) Non ho bevuto *del* vino. (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 60, ex. (7))
  a. #Ho bevuto (del) Prosecco e (del) Cabernet, ma non ho bevuto del Ribolla o del Sauvignon. *- #specific*
  b. Ho bevuto solo (dei) liquori e (dell') acqua minerale.       *- non-specific*

We propose that the apparent lack of specific readings of *di*+art in combination with mass nouns relates to the ontological domain of reference that characterizes mass nouns and distinguishes them from plural count nouns. It is known that the domain of reference of plural count nouns can be structured as a join semi-lattice whose bottom line is composed by atoms (i.e., individuals or entities) (Link 1983). As mass nouns are non-atomic (Landman 1989) – at least in their linguistic representation (Doetjes 2012) – but can only refer to amounts of matter, their extension may be argued to correspond to a semi-lattice without the bottom line. If this assumption is correct, the application of a semantic choice function to a mass noun yielding a specific, speaker-oriented referential portion of matter would be more difficult to achieve, since referential readings single out one or more *individuals* (a similar argument has also been made by Ihsane 2008 to account for the lack of specificity of French *du*-phrases). A caveat is in order here: mass nouns *can* indeed receive specific interpretations when other prosodic or syntactic factors restrict the referential boundaries of the portion of matter denoted by the mass noun (i.e., contrastive anaphors, relative clauses, contrastive focus, indicative mood in opaque contexts, etc.). Thus, if we assume, following von Heusinger (2011: 1030), that "the more descriptive content a noun phrase has, the more likely it is to have a specific reading", we can explain why, in these contexts, a choice function may be applied to mass nouns as well (*Del pane l'ho mangiato, dell'altro no*. Pinzin & Poletto 2021b: ex. (9)).

*Selected references*

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